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ABSTRACT

Writings in the field of human development and learning in the adult years can be integrated into a simple theory. A theory is defined as a policy, hypothesis, or set of principles used or proposed as a basis for action. The adult years are defined as a time in which one makes choices with a degree of maturity and wisdom and assumes responsibility for one's life and actions. This theory proposes that choices are shaped by messages from both the exterior objective world and the interior life. A person makes choices during this interplay between the values within the interior life and the messages from the exterior world. This interplay, or clash of values and messages, may be acute during a developmental phase or transition in life. This experience can be, and often is, the trigger or motivation for learning. Over time, adults can either expand their life space, limit their life space, or retrogress as they live in a state of conditional freedom. (Contains 66 references.)
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A CHOICE AND GROWTH BASED THEORY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING IN THE ADULT YEARS

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Abstract

This paper integrates writings in the field of human development and learning in the adult years into a theory. A theory is defined as a policy, hypothesis or set of principles used or proposed as a basis for action. The adult years are defined as a time in which one makes choices with a degree of maturity and wisdom and assumes responsibility for one's life and actions.

The theory proposes that choices are shaped by messages both from the exterior objective world and the interior life. A person makes choices during this interplay between the values within the interior life and the messages from the exterior world. This interplay, or clash of values and messages, may be acute during a developmental phase, or transition in life. This experience can be and often is the trigger or motivation for learning. The adult, over time, can either expand his/her life-space, limit his/her life-space, or retrogress as he/she lives in a state of conditional freedom.

This paper provides a simple, coherent theory placed within a unifying theoretical framework around which to integrate and organize this wealth of material.

INTRODUCTION

Several aspects of the adult years and learning are discussed in the literature on adult and continuing education. (McClusky, 1963; Tough, 1971; Kohlberg, 1968; Merriam, 1980; Peck, 1956; Stevens-Long, 1979; Turner and Helms, 1989) A few other authors sketch some particular aspect of a theory of human development and learning in some detail. (Levinson, 1978; Erikson, 1959; Havighurst, 1972; Buhler, 1968; Kubler-Ross. 1978; Kimmel, 1980; Datan and Ginsberg, 1975; Lion, 1989; Hopper, 1986; Gould, 1978) A few writers have attempted to encompass the results of research on the human life span into rather large and cumbersome volumes. (Sze, 1975; Schuster and Ashburn, 1980; Schaie and Willis, 1986).

This paper integrates and synthesizes these and other writings into a rather simple theory. The theory juxtapositions learning opportunities with choices made among competing values that a person debates within himself/herself within the two polarities of the interior life and the exterior world. This struggle for a decision often occurs more sharply within transition points in the life span. Implications for learning in the adult years are suggested for consideration.

Interest in adult development, education, and learning as a field of study and practice is reflected in the growing number of publications, conferences, and courses in adult and continuing education. The publication rate of research relative to even one aspect of adult and continuing education, namely psychology of adult development, has grown to more than 1,000 articles and chapters per year. (Schaie and Willis, 1986, p. 3)

Even for the professionals in the field of adult and continuing education, it is impossible to read all of the written material; furthermore, some of the older published material has long been out of print. Thus there is a need for a theoretical framework around which to organize this multiplicity of research.

For the purpose of this paper, a theory is defined as an analysis of a set of facts in their relation to one another; a belief, policy, hypothesis or set of principles used as a basis for action.

A good theory is intelligible; defensible; has explanatory power; internal consistency; does not reject, neglect or alter the generally acceptable core of empirical beliefs; and cannot be verified by direct observations. (McKenzie, 1991)

Someone has suggested that there is nothing quite so useful as a good theory. A good theory can serve as a focus or perspective, a vantage point from which to see life. A good theory can serve as a set of beliefs and values that conditions what we gain from any perspective, and of course, as a guide to practice, the "doing" of the theory. A

theory that does not someway affect life has no value. As I. Kant proposed: theory without practice is empty, and practice without theory is blind.

In a review of the literature, Merriam (1987) concludes that common characteristics or goals of adult learning theory include (a) self-direction/autonomy, (b) a relationship of experience to learning (c) the importance of reflection on one's learning, and (d) action of some sort as a necessary expression of learning that has occurred (p. 197).

The criteria for selecting the writings used in this paper are fairly straightforward. Elias and Merriam (1980), in their influential work, categorize various theorists by major schools of thought. The theory proposed in this paper presents a different approach. This theory of adult life and learning has been developed within the Judeo-Christian tradition of free choice and responsible selfhood. Priority has been given to those works that are consistent both with a good theory and a theory of adult education as defined by Merriam. Priority has been given to using the original work of writers in the field wherever possible. Writers such as Lindeman, Allport, Buhler, Peck, Kohlberg, and Levinson have had in the past, and continue to have in the present, a major influence on adult and continuing education. Finally, priority has been given to writings that present broad principles and ideas rather than narrowly defined subcomponents of development and learning in the adult years. A substantial portion of the later works address technical-programmatic matters that help adults acquire functional competencies and are thus outside the scope of this paper.

From another perspective, the choice growth based theory is presented in the hope that the reader, lay people and scholars, and students of human development and adult learning may (1) review this theory against their own theory and principals, (2) modify it to meet their own needs, and (3) stimulate inquiries, reflection or research within the field of adult education, adult learning and human development.

The adult years, to be interpreted with any degree of reality, must be perceived and considered within the context of the birth-to-death weltanschauung (world-view). (McKenzie, 1987, 1991) Therefore although the theory speaks primarily about the adult years, the total life span is included as a framework.

DEFINITION OF AN ADULT

But who is an adult? Many definitions have been applied to the term adult. This theory posits that an adult is one who lives life in the freedom-responsibility continuum and paradox. Put another way, when does one cross the line into adulthood? A person crosses the line into adulthood bit by bit, decision by decision, when that person makes choices with a degree of maturity and wisdom, assumes responsibility for his/her own

life and actions and the consequences of those actions. In the active tense, decisions are open for resolution day by day. In the passive tense, not to decide is to decide...as a possible nonchoice. (Sartre, 1990; McKenzie, 1991) One is not allowed the luxury of lame excuses; e.g., as a popular T.V. comedian of a few years ago used to say "the devil made me do it!"

Knowles (1989) suggests that we become adults psychologically when we come to perceive ourselves as being essentially responsible for our own lives; when we develop a deep psychological need for others to perceive us and to treat us as being capable of taking responsibility for ourselves.

ASSUMPTIONS OF THE THEORY

The theory assumes that the adult is constantly making existential choices. Existentialism is defined as the process of making choices grounded in the experience of living in time and space. Adult life within the bounds of existentialism involves living an authentic responsible selfhood radically free and responsible in responding to the complexities, absurdities and problems of life. (Reese, 1980; Sartre, 1990)

Choices are shaped both by the exterior objective world (law, courts, "real world"); i.e., messages from the outside world and messages from the interior life (attitudes, values, thought processes, etc.); i.e., messages from the inner life of the adult. Incorrect interpretation or misinterpretation of these messages can, of course, flaw the validity of the choice and subsequent actions.

This concept expands, modifies, and applies the work of May (1975) in his theory of the creative artist to the life-long learning process. May suggests that the creative artist lives between the subjective and the objective. The subjective pole is represented by the individual. The objective pole is composed of reality, the environment, and the world around the individual. It is in the clash of these two poles that the creative artist develops his/her work.

Existential choices are constantly being made within the stream of consciousness as exterior and interior messages impinge upon the interior life workings of a human being. Out of this crucible (severe test), the human makes choices. Choices may not only be made within the realm of conscious choice, but also within the subtle interplay of the subconscious and conscious world. This process includes interaction among the diverse elements within the inner flow of life. Within this perspective, to choose to grow is still the center of the process.

The adult, over time, can either grow and expand his/her life-space; limit his/her life-space; stagnate; or retrogress as he/she lives in a state of conditional freedom.

Lindeman (1926) suggests that a well organized and adequately expressed life deserves to be called beautiful no less than a well conceived statue (p. 88). The goal of life in theological terms might be stated to "grow in wisdom, and in stature, and in favor with God and man". (Luke 2:52)

This theory assumes that the adult lives in conditional freedom, not complete freedom. There are always limitations and constraints on freedom. These limitations and constraints can be social, environmental, hereditary, cultural, or the cumulative result of individual choices, either good or bad choices.

This theory also recognizes that, to a certain extent, we often have little control over what happens to us. Life events happen. National and world events happen. Bad things do happen to good people. These events must be accounted for in any realistic theory of the adult life.

Shakespeare in one of the dramatic scenes from Hamlet, has Hamlet utter a powerful soliloquy.

> To be, or not to be, that is the question:
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
> And by opposing end them? (III, i, 56)

Shakespeare goes on to name a few of the "heartaches and thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to", the whips and scorns of time; the oppressor's wrong, humiliating treatment, unrequited love, and the grunt and sweat under a weary life.

This theory incorporates the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" as one important variable in the life of the adult. Yet this theory concurs with May (1975), Frankl (1976) and other writers, that while in some aspects of life we may have little control over what happens to us, we do have control over how we react to the event.

This theory accepts the principle that humans are endowed with freedom and are called to respond to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune in a responsible manner.

The traditional heredity vs. environment argument (are our lives shaped primarily by our heredity or our environments) is in need of modification. The modification suggested in this paper is contained in the formula:

Heredity x Environment Slings and Arrows of Outrageous Fortune	X	Choices Made Within the Clash Between the Interior Life and Exterior Life	=	Flow of Life, the Lived Life (Growth, Stagnation, or Regression)

Germane to the modified formula are the assumptions that:

* Choices narrow or widen our future options and choices;

* Some adults have imposed upon themselves an extremely limited range of choices by not expanding their options for growth or life space within which to maneuver;

* People choose what they will be. They are in the process of becoming what they will be, and are responsible for themselves and their life choices. (Maslow, 1971; Allport, 1955)

* One does not learn by experience, but by reflecting on experience. (Brookfield, 1988; Marsick, 1988; Friere, 1968, 1987; Mezirow and Associates, 1990; Clark and Wilson, 1991)

* Each developmental task or transition point that the adult transverses provides a unique opportunity for a learning episode.

It will be noted that the developmental task or transition phase may provide either the opportunity for learning or the motivation for learning. Life experiences often serve as the trigger for growth and learning in the adult years. It is up to the person, either individually, or in cooperation with the significant others in the same approximate phase of life, to choose to learn.

This brings up the vexing problem of motivation. There is not one all encompassing theory of motivation. (Long, 1983) Rather there are specific models that focus on a specific type of motivation; oral reasoning, psychological drives, "push" and "pull" concepts, lower-order and higher-order motives, the intensity, the temporal and qualitative aspects, etc. (Schaie, and Willis, 1986, pp. 218-253)

The learning experience proposed in this paper could be any one of the various learning modes: self directed; structured, time oriented program led by a facilitator such as a workshop, or conference; structured reading, "free talk" such as conceived by Grundtvig; (Warren, 1987) reflection-action or other critical reflection mode of learning. The

learning, of course, must be preceded by a motivation to learn. In this choice growth based theory, the basic motivation often is within the context of a developmental phase or transition point which serves as a trigger. (Aslanian and Brickel, 1980)

FRAMEWORK FOR THE THEORY

With the aforementioned assumptions, an overview of the overarching or integrating and unifying framework within which the theory operates can be portrayed as in Figure 1.

The adult life can be conceived along a continuum, (middle line of Figure 1 from left to right) from isolation (at birth) through seven stages (1) isolation in the womb, (2) dependency at infancy, (3) independence at youth, (4) interdependence at adulthood (5) independence again in the late mid years, (6) moving toward dependence again in older adulthood, (7) to isolation at death.

Within the framework of Figure 1, the preadult years would stimulate emotional response, right side of the brain, as well as the rational, left side of the brain (Restak, 1984). The task of the young adult is to integrate three major tasks: behavior, thinking, and the affective portions of human personality. If these three tasks are not integrated smoothly, the adult in later life might be in a "strum and drang" (storm and stress) mode of life.

The mid years suggest either a smooth transition or a fragmentation, integration and restructuring process (Merriam, 1980). This can be a corollary to the "storm and stress" period of young adulthood.

Basic to the theory is the fact that the adult is always in the process of developing an individualized and well defined life style based on choices and actions (made or not made) throughout the life span.

The adult life consists of a survival system (lower half of Figure 1). A survival system is defined as food, clothing, shelter and that which allows a human to exist as a physical organism. A survival system provides the necessary ingredients to sustain life and the survival of the human species to the next generation. It does not speak directly to the quality of human existence.

The survival system consists of a healthful ecological system, without which human life could not be sustained nor could it survive. Some form of work or income maintenance would seem to be a necessity. Civic duty is one ingredient of a survival system. Civic duty glues together the social, moral, and political fabric of life in a democratic society, without which anarchy or a totalitarian form of government would reign, (although the

fabric is sustained by a minority of citizens if the studies are reasonably correct). A health promotion and medical care system is utilized by all and the writer considers it as a component of a survival system.

The writer incorporates fun, games, and recreation in the human survival system and leisure in the support system. Pieper (1963) and Degrazia (1964) distinguishes between free time (all that we do apart from work), recreation (fun explosion) and leisure (attitude toward life).

The writer offers the following concept as used in Bischof (1976). "[We] ... need a new view of the life cycle. Not to divide life horizontally into discrete stages: childhood (play), adolescence (study), adulthood (work), and old age (retirement) each with its special concerns. Rather we need a view of the life cycle as a three dimensional combination of play, study, and work in appropriate portions at each age" (p. 251).

The upper half of the figure depicts a support system. A support system is defined as that which enhances and enriches human life above and beyond mere survival. It speaks to the quality of life. It includes the aspects of life that distinguish human life from the animal kingdom, gives meaning to life, and makes life worth living.

The writer includes a simplified lifestyle and leisure in the support system. A simplified lifestyle is necessary in most of the world but an option to many in the USA. If the natural resources continue to be abused, used, and misused, a simplified lifestyle will be a necessity, not merely an option or talking point.

Leisure as defined by Pieper (1963) is an attitude of the mind and a condition of the soul that fosters a capacity to perceive the reality of the world. The author goes on to suggest that unless we regain the art of silence and insight, the ability for nonactivity, unless we substitute true leisure for our hectic amusements, we will destroy our culture and ourselves. One writer rightly suggests that the Devil hates both silence and music (Lewis, 1982) Both are qualities that are an integral part of the life of the mature adult.

As Thoreau states "The details of life are too much with us ... simplify, simplify, simplify". (Atkinson, 1950, p. 82) The adult does not need to reflect the hectic lifestyle critiqued in the hymnal phrase "buying and selling, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers". The adult can choose to simplify his/her life.

Friendship is an extremely individualistic phenomenon. A friend is defined as one who is nonjudgmental with shared mutual interests, trust, communication, one who stands by you in time of need or when you need the presence of another human being. (Main, unpublished text) This theory posits playmates while young and friends in adulthood. Probably, in our mobile society, some friends are made serially and relinquished as one

moves through career and geographic changes in the life span. Friends are to be distinguished from acquaintances. Friends are few. Some studies suggest 3-4. (Bischof, 1976) Acquaintances are many. It behooves us, as Shakespeare says, "What friends thou has bind them to thy soul with hoops of steel."

The support system consists of primary and secondary relationships with other humans in the family, extended family, neighborhood or world. These relationships can be either vertical (nongeographic based) such as state, national or world organization based on a specific interest or horizontal (geographic based) such as neighborhood association or local church organization. (Warren, 1969)

The adult has the potential to learn throughout the life span, but learning will not occur unless the person chooses to learn and grow. Growth must be initiated and cultivated.

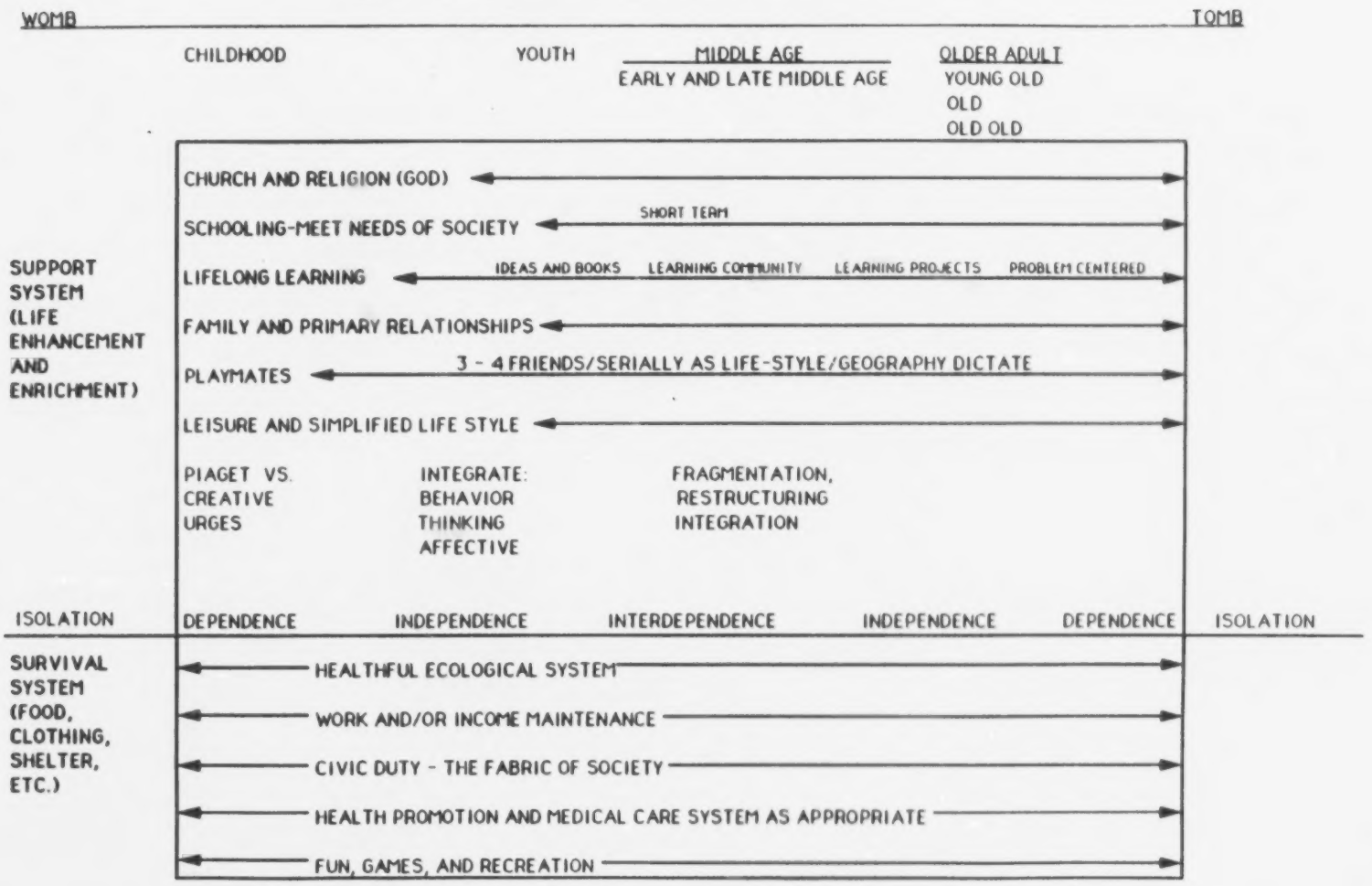
However the modes of learning vary. The theory accepts that school, in the younger years, is mostly a social and civic venture, the transmission of cultural values, and "getting an education"; the banking theory rather than a focus on free and independent inquiry. (Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982, p. 2) But most adult learning is outside the formal academic setting: learning projects that are either problem or project centered and/or stimulated by books and ideas needs or goals. (Tough, 1971) There is a difference between schooling, getting an education and learning.

Most adults have dealings with church, synagogue, temple, or organized religion and God or, at a minimum, have experienced a self-defined religious experience. Recent Gallup polls indicate that a significant percent of the population responded that they believe in God. Each Gallup poll indicates that a significant number of the population attends church regularly. Thus religion and moral choices can influence an adult's life. Some forms of organized religion, it is readily conceded, can be a support system that enhances life or, conversely, negate growth and development; i.e., religion can be either liberating and growth oriented or confining and stultifying to the person.

Both the survival system and the support system require constant maintenance and effort. Failure of the survival system can result in the death of an individual, society, or the planet earth. Failure or inadequacies in the support system can result in lack of development, failure to thrive, and a lesser quality of life.

The top lines of Figure 1 sets the broad overall framework for human life from the womb to the tomb and, hopefully, both life and death with dignity. This serves as a reminder of the stages and transitions in human life. Each stage of transition may be the background or life-scape for different types of learning episodes, on the other hand, the critical phases in life may pass us by barely noticed.

FIGURE 1 OVERVIEW OF CHOICE BASED THEORY



TENTATIVE SET OF VALUES

Lest this portrayal of the theory seem too static to meet the demands of a constantly changing, dynamic, and growth oriented concept of adulthood, the following values act as the "driving mechanism" for the theory.

These values have been hammered out with much anguish over a period of years and are offered only as suggestions. A critical examination of anyone's practice will disclose an undergirding set of principles or values. This set of values is based on critical thinking about the writer's own practice. They are consistent with the literature on adult and continuing education, offer explanatory power, and a perspective on adult development and learning.

Each adult and adult educator will struggle with his/her own values and will be modified as he/she negotiates, learns, and acts while traversing the developmental stages and transition points in life.

Overall Principle/Value. Adult life, at its best, is growth oriented and requires a continuing series of choices and actions based on choices. One is responsible for one's choices, actions, and the resulting consequences.

These choices are made within the ongoing clash of the interior life versus exterior message drama of life, and one's reaction to these life-events.

Transition points and developmental phases offer the potential for learning episodes. One can choose either to use or not use the transition points and life experiences as opportunities to learn.

The interior-exterior struggle combined with a transition phase could trigger a learning episode as noted earlier. The exact nature of the learning episode would be determined by the person. It could take the form of critical thinking, (reflection-analysis-action), self-directed learning, a structured learning sequence such as a course or workshop, or any method chosen by the person.

1. World View

The adult is goal oriented. To borrow a phrase from the theologians, the adult experience is one of teleology and the adult a teleologist; that is, he/she believes that life is directed toward an ultimate end or shaped by purpose. (Buhler, 1968; Appelbaum, 1970; McKenzie, 1991) This applies both to one's personal life and the world scene. Other options about the overall flow of life and the world, which the writer rejects, are

cyclical (life consists of ever recurring cycles), rise and fall (life just consists of highs and lows, ups and downs), and progressive (continual upward progress). The writer rejects the old saying "we are getting better everyday in every way".

2. Human Nature

The adult experience, in theory if not in fact, is grounded in reality. One could be either an optimist or a pessimist. The adult is challenged continually to rub one's nose in reality. As one wit says, "If everything else fails, face reality". Life is a process of being stripped of one's illusion. (Levinson, 1978)

3. Personal Philosophy

The adult experience is in line with the humanist/existentialist position. One could be either a liberal or conservative. If one is a liberal, the mode could be more in the line of "wanting to conserve our liberal traditions". As a realist, the maxim holds true that civilization (and self) is in a life/death struggle and race against barbarism. (McKenzie, 1978; Bergevin, 1967)

4. Harmony

The adult experiences a lifelong struggle and transvaluation (reexamination of priorities) (McClusky, 1971; Main, 1979) within the common ventures of life: work, leisure, family, and God. (Trueblood, 1949) These core elements of life, which we hold in common, need to be kept in harmony and balance so that any one element does not exceed its due weight.

5. Consistency

The adult experience is one of life-long striving for consistency between action, thinking, and emotions. The mature person is one who is able to consistently keep his/her actions, emotions and thinking consistent with each other. (Dorman and Rebelsky, 1975) Often one or the other is out of kilter, which causes one to be inconsistent, out of alignment, or out of synch. Other points of needed consistency are among human relationships, self-development and activities of work and leisure. (Buhler, 1968) All aspects of life are either consistent or inconsistent with our goals.

6. Citizenship

The adult experience is one of contributing to the good of society. The primary role of the state (and workplace) is to provide the conditions for a person to be a human being in the best sense of the word. And a primary role of an adult is to be a "citizen of the world". (McKenzie, 1987 and 1991)

7. Solution Seeking

The adult experience is to strive to solve problems. Rarely is the adult motivated to learn unless a problem (need) exists or a project is deemed important (goal). Most problems are of multiple etiology and require a multidisciplinary approach. Adult education is often not the answer alone, but the adult educator can work in concert with others toward possible solutions. (Tough, 1971; Knowles, 1970)

8. Cooperation vs. Competition

The goal of adult experience is to live in a cooperative mode and within the framework of group support. Competition is seldom useful and often harmful. If one must compete, the competition could be with one's own best self. (Bettelheim, 1969; Elias and Merriam, 1980, p. 87)

9. Growth and Regression

The adult experience probably includes both periods of growth, stagnation, and regression (Buhler, 1968). Times of stagnation and regression may be a prelude to growth. Lewin (1948) understands this principle well in his maxim on planned change. One needs to ***unfreeze*** the system, project or life; ***move it*** toward its goal, then ***refreeze*** the system, project, or life. The ***refreezing is*** needed in order to consolidate recent life events or growth spurts. A period of nongrowth, stability or maybe even stagnation is needed before ***unfreezing*** the system, project, or life again and moving it one more step toward its goal.

The comparable theological concept that corresponds roughly to a period of stagnation is "siccia", a period of spiritual dryness when life seems barren, forlorn, lonely and cold. Siccia may be the prelude to the opposite concept portrayed in the lively phrase "Did not our hearts burn within us". (Luke 24:32)

10. Bodily Decay and Inward Renewal

The adult experience is a paradox and an enigma: to strive for wisdom and growth although at the same time experiencing a lifetime of bodily decline and change. Kastenbaum (1975) uses the dramatic phrase for this paradox "the ripening and rotting" process. This insight is embedded in other literature with a more positive outcome. "Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is capable of being renewed day by day". (I Corinthians 4:16)

11. Death

In childhood, one can probably only grasp the concept of the meaning of death in an intellectual mode. A belief system to cope with death or the heightened existential awareness of the aging process and death, may be developed in early adulthood to mid years and expanded upon in subsequent age-linked transitions. (Merriam, 1980; Turner and Helms, 1989) Yet death is such a significant event in every person's life that he/she will need to develop a personal, philosophical, moral or religious belief system in order to cope with it. (Peck, 1956)

This heightened awareness of aging and death may shape, not only the life style of the person, but also have a profound effect on the motivation for living and any subsequent learning experiences. This would seem to be especially true from the mid years of life onward, a time when one faces the prospect of his/her own mortality. (Becker, 1973)

12. Critical Thinking

The adult is capable of and has the responsibility to continually be engaging in critical thinking. Critical thinking is an essential skill for adults in these complex times. Critical thinking is defined as, reflection - analysis - action or (1) identifying and challenging assumptions and (2) exploring and imagining alternatives. The mature adult reflects on the assumptions underlying his/her actions and considers new ways of looking at the world and living in it.

THEORY IN ACTION

This section will operationalize the theory in a transition period of a young adult whom we will call Sam.

Sam has made a series of good choices up to this point in his life. He has left the dependency stage of living with his family of origin and moved to the stage of

independence. He has chosen to finish high school, stay away from the drug culture, participate in sports, made a tentative commitment to a job, and has a few high school friends in the neighborhood.

Throughout this phase of his life, Sam experiences the clash of values both within his interior life and the messages sent to him from the exterior world.

In his interior life, Sam is struggling with the polarity of intimacy versus isolation; the capacity to commit himself to a woman versus the avoidance of intimacy; the capacity to love and to work versus character problems and promiscuous behavior, a sense of achievement, creativity and play versus peer pressure to achieve only mediocrity.

Sam's exterior world is bombarding him with messages of explicit sex and outward beauty, the free and easy life uncluttered by commitment, song and music groups that extol the pleasure gained by the use of drugs, highly paid athletes who put low value on school and learning; the lure of spending money by working part-time rather than concentrating on the discipline of learning and staying in school and the harsh reality of the cost of books, tuition, and living expenses.

Sam is faced with the dilemma of choosing a course of action. He is struggling to choose a course of action in the midst of this clash of values within the interior life and the messages from the exterior worlds. Sam makes a choice which nurtures growth. The choice expands his life and puts him in a position to continue to thrive and grow.

Let us examine one specific decision that Sam has to make, namely, to drop out of school or stay in school.

By heredity, Sam has dyslexia. The dyslexia has been recognized and proper arrangements for learning have been made. His home environment is neutral to learning. His parents are in the lower-middle socio-economic group. A lack of money is a factor in all decisions about school. His life events are on the normal side, that is nothing dramatic has happened yet.

Sam recognizes, in his internal life, that he likes school, and is a solid "B" student. He has a wholesome respect for learning. He recognizes that the peer group that he hangs out with are all oriented toward school. His values include discipline and hard work. He is goal-oriented. The internal life is for staying in school.

At the same time, his exterior world is bombarding him with mixed messages. The want ads send a message about the need for education; low-paying jobs are predominant; the pay scale is based on specific skills or education levels. The newspapers highlight the changing mix of jobs. T.V. messages signal that the good life equals being rich. His

parents send messages about how hard their life is without advanced education.

Other messages are sent by a summer job that he dislikes but needs to continue in order to remain in school. Instant gratification is hammered home by the T.V. ads. The popular music sends messages of fun and games, sex and booze.

Sam makes his choice in the midst of this clash of values within his inner life and the messages from the exterior world and his reaction to these messages.

During his young adult life Sam made few "bad" choices that would limit his growth and life structure. On the other hand, Sam has yet to make a multitude of choices which might limit his life space and cause him to retrogress or stagnate. Since life is dynamic, he might yet choose to pay heed to the messages from the exterior world and enter the drug culture. This in turn would limit his functional and mental abilities. This might cause him to drop out of school, face a brush with the law, and even a stint in prison (retrogression from a previous higher level of living). This choice, made in the dynamic interplay of the internal life and external world would limit Sam's life.

Even with "good" choices, Sam will need to face choices, growth or nongrowth decisions, listen to many claims on him from the interior life and messages from the external world. These decisions could revolve around being or not being a life-long learner; learning about and adjusting to bodily change and decay; making adjustments to a heightened awareness of death as he, his friends, and his parents grow older; how best to use his leisure; and struggle with his world view as his life expands, contracts or stagnates.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING IN THE ADULT YEARS

The adult life is not a simple monolith but is exceedingly complex and develops over time, with life choices and learning episodes determining either growth, stagnation, or retrogression.

The range of options open/options closed over time with choices needing to be made, actions taken, and learning options explored all along the time span continuum is staggering.

This theory highlights, at least, the potential complexity of the adult life and the multitude of decision-points that can be opportunities to learn. In a sense, it is a wonder that few adults achieve the degree of life satisfaction that one would hope for in this life ... and few do. (Buhler, 1968)

This choice growth based theory, or an adaptation of it, could serve as a theory around

which to conceptualize the adult life span. The writer would suggest that this theory meets the four-fold criteria for a good theory of adult learning: self-direction, relation to experience, reflection, and action. It can provide a weltanschauung (world view) as opposed to an over simplistic view of learning in the adult years. (McClusky, 1963; Main, 1979; McKenzie, 1991)

This theory could serve as the unifying basis for action in the adult education arena. As Thoreau (Walden, 1854) wrote:

> To be a philosopher (theorist) is not merely to have subtle thoughts, or even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically.

In addition, this theory could be used to:

* Focus on the major life choices of the adult years and thus avoid the trap of "majoring in minors".

* Reexamine the stimulus-response of the behaviorists (S-R) vs. the stimulus-organism-response of the humanists (S-O-R). This paper suggests that the adult is a complex human being constantly in a growth or nongrowth decision making process. The adult is the intervening and crucial variable in the freedom-responsibility continuum between stimulus and response.

* Be more aware of the stages within the stages of life (isolation, dependence, independence, interdependence, independence, dependence and isolation again) and the possibilities of growth, stagnation, and regression.

* Be aware that some adults are adults in age only, and lacking appropriate life and growth choices, are really functioning at the preadolescent level in some aspects of their lives.

* Be more aware of the external and internal nature of messages as these messages influence the decision-making process, learning episodes, and actions of the adult learner.

* Be more aware of the numerous and sometimes vexing kinds--types, variety, quality, and quantity of the choices that are involved in the process of becoming a more fully-functional adult.

* Remind us that being a reasonably mature adult is not easy. An adult is continually

in the process of making decisions with some degree of maturity and wisdom.

* Provide a basis for the 'doing' of adult education by educators in everyday teaching-learning episodes.

* Provide insight into the structure and flow of our own lives.

* Provide a degree of hope since many an "unsung hero" has lived life with dignity, wisdom and meaning and striven to pass on the heritage of what is right, beautiful, true, and good to his/her fellow pilgrims on earth and onto the next generation. (Peck, 1956)

SUMMARY

Often one's theoretical framework is implicit, unstated, unwritten, and can only be surmised from the words, actions, and behavior of the educator. This paper has attempted to develop an explicit theoretical framework as a starting point to organize the ever increasing wealth of data and information about the adult and learning.

The theory suggests that we become adults when we assume responsibility for our lives, actions, and consequences of those actions.Choices in the adult years are influenced by not only heredity and environment, but by life events, the interaction between the interior life and the exterior world, and the correct interpretation of those events. Developmental transition points in the adult life are often opportunities for the adult to learn. We learn, in part, by reflecting in a critical mode on the transition events. These life choices then determine an adult's growth, stagnation, or regression.

The complexity and dynamic nature of the adult life is portrayed in the theory. As one student remarked, being an adult is no easy task. Nevertheless, the choices we make and the learning episodes undertaken or left unresolved will influence the very shape, form, and texture of life both for individuals and society.

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